

Assignment 2 – Portfolio

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Cultural Institution/Organisation

The organisation that will be explored in this segment of the portfolio is a section of the BFI's home physical media-video label distribution called BFI Flipside. The aim and purpose of the Flipside as stated on their website is that they are 'dedicated to rediscovering the margins of British film, reclaiming a space for forgotten movies and filmmakers who would otherwise be in danger of disappearing from our screens forever. It is a home for UK cinematic oddities, offering everything from exploitation documentaries to B-movies, countercultural curios and obscure classics. If it's weird, British, and forgotten, then it's Flipside.' (BFI Shop) The purpose of this segment is to explore the reasons as to why the label is important and who is consuming it.

BFI Flipside have released many different cinematic styles of films in their label which constitutes of genre pieces such as Pete Walkers *Man of Violence (1970)* whilst also presenting pieces that are as diverse as European art dramas like Jerzy Skolimowskis *Deep End (1970)*. With a diverse range of cult British films that are on the margin of British consciousness to quote the BFI themselves, the question is why is this important for the BFI and why having such a diverse range is important to the curated collection of films. By looking at the collection as one whole curated piece rather than separate titles you can clearly sense that the collection evokes a certain contextual sense of Britain on film that has not been clearly highlighted in other collections or filmic oeuvres. Britain has often been stereotypically presented on screen as a depiction of its 60s representation with Petrie and Williams (2019) stating that 'many of the most archetypally sixties films, most notably those associated with 'swinging London' or psychedelia, now looking very much like period pieces. But other British productions from the 1960s are much more readily relatable to the style and content of contemporary films, to the extent that the decade could arguably be regarded as the starting point for modern British cinema.' (Petrie DJ and Williams M, 2019, p351). The films contained in the Flipside collection can easily be associated with the statement due to the wide variety of cinematic forms explored in the collection. The collection spans releases between 1952 and 1984 whilst many of those releases are from the late sixties and early seventies it displays the prominence of the era and why there is still an appetite for cinephiles and collectors for British cinema, especially the Flipside.

Sam Dunn (2011) who is head of video publishing and distribution at the BFI originally curated the flipside label believed that it was 'a place for those films that never fitted in and were in danger of being lost forever. Most were only meant to fill a cinema for a couple of weeks and there's a tension between the director's desire to make a good film and the producer's need to get bums on seats by showing some violence or nudity. It makes for a very interesting type of film that gets overlooked because it's seen as commodity rather than art.' (Watts, P. 2011) Dunn mentions the context in which the films were made by discussing that they were seen as a commodity rather than art which is interesting when it concerns the modern context in which the films are consumed and viewed. As it has been stated before many of the films are not well known and were barely a hit back when they were released so from a

production and distribution point of view the label on paper was never going to be a guaranteed bona fide hit in terms of commercial sales compared with other titles that the BFI had released through their main label with examples such as the well-known films of Akira Kurosawa and Mike Leigh.

Many of the prints and source material for the flipside's releases have come from the BFI's national film archive which states that its aims and goals are to look 'after one of the largest and most important collections of film and television in the world. Its teams of experts ensure that the collection is preserved and developed for future generations and made widely accessible to today's audiences.' (BFI National Archive) due to the company's mission objective many of the flipside's releases are available on the BFI player as its own curated section of films for the audience to view. As the prominence of the streaming platform has become known opening the collection to a wider audience through the means of the BFI's own streaming platform, the films of the flipside are open to casual viewers as well as the cinephile, collector market that the physical releases are aimed at. Finding the film negatives and sources whilst restoring them for release and public viewing is an expensive process as well as time consuming as Dunn (2013) states 'The length of time each Flipside title takes varies from project to project. Nightbirds was the result of a couple of years' work, all things considered. Some titles happen more quickly, with fewer challenges facilitating a speedier turnaround.' (Conterio, M, 2013) this is the important aspect of the flipside as without the due care and attention that these films receive from the BFI, they would struggle to see the light of day especially in the pristine restored format that the BFI carefully release them in for lovers of film to consume.

As stated in the introduction the purpose of this segment was to explore the importance and the reason for the flipside existing in the climate of the BFI and physical media distribution labels. What has been discovered is the seeming reason as to why the Flipside was originally setup and why it continues to this day to release titles in the collection. The flipside does not just represent a collection of lost British films it also represents a recontextualization and reappraisal of British film that highlights the variety of cinematic styles on offer throughout the mid-century of British cinema. Dunn (2013) summarises that statement here as he believes that 'People's perception of the British film industry is quite negative. We often ignore what is on our doorstep because we think to be cultured is to know what is going on around the world. This is an attempt to counter that.' (Conterio, M, 2013) the flipside has done a valiant effort to counter the claims that Dunn speaks of whilst also providing a new lease of life for many British films and filmmakers that were forgotten or at the very least works that had yet to have found an audience in the modern cinematic landscape.

Cultural Artifact

The Artifact that is going to be explored in this section of the portfolio relates to the last segment of the portfolio in that it is a specific release by BFI Flipside home video distribution label. The release in question is Pete Walker's *Man of Violence (aka Moon)* originally released in 1970, this being the sixth title that the label had released to date having come out on a dual-format DVD/Blu-Ray release in 2009. A short synopsis of what the Flipside have deemed the plot on the back of the physical release reads 'In a world of gangs and villains, one man, Moon, will stop at nothing to get the girl and take the spoils. Pete Walker's affectionate low-budget homage to the gangster thriller is packed with sights and sounds from a Britain about to swing out of the 60s and into a somewhat less optimistic decade' (BFI, 2009) in the blurb on the back of the release the BFI manage to tease the plot of the film, praise its director whilst also hint at the historical context in which the film was made in. What makes this particular

release from the Flipside interesting is the fact that it not only a previously unreleased film from Pete Walker it is a double feature with another of his sixty's films that had not got a release in Britain before now, *The Big Switch (aka Strip Poker)* from 1968.

This release predominately targets cinephiles especially those that collect physical media. The cinephile has changed since the inception of home media and has become its own form of self-curation as Barbara Klinger (2006) states

'Consider how the establishment of a home archive – the arena in which the possession of films is most vividly realized and displayed – affects reception. Appearing at first glance as simply a utilitarian procedure, the organization of films within the personal library is a significant activity. As the collector assumes control over his or her videocassettes and DVDs, classifying titles within the order and logic of the collection itself, the personal archive appears as an inner sanctum. Here, the archivist gains a sense of mastery over a private universe' - (Klinger, 2006, p56)

this is completely true of the Flipside with this release as they are only released on physical media for collectors as the average film fan will never have heard of these films unless they had seen them on original release. Although we are in the digital streaming age of cinema, owning a home archive through physical media releases is on the rise with an abundance of different boutique film labels that are available for collectors to digest and procure for their own collection. The Flipside have integrated the use of a numbered spine on the physical releases in a similar fashion to the popular American home media label, the Criterion Collection. This is an enticing form of bait for collectors as the knowledge of not owning every single spine number is the bane of a film collector. Similarly, to the Criterion Collection it feels like you are collecting a brand rather than the specific film or even that specific filmmaker due to the importance that the marketing has put on the brand and the overall appeal of the label. The Flipside has aimed its whole approach towards this target audience as cinephiles equates to a form of mania which inhabits both the general public and filmmakers as Hutchinson (2017) states in her article for the BFI 'late 20th-century cinephile could display his or her enthusiasm on shelves, with tapes or discs, ordered chronologically or alphabetically. Again, directors emerged from this fan culture with video-shop browsers picking up cameras to shoot films inspired or informed, by their omnivorous consumption.' (Hutchinson, P, 2017) this is represented in the *Man of Violence* release with Nicholas Winding Refn having a quote on the front cover of the release which compliments the notion that these releases are made for cinephiles whilst being promoted by cineastes.

Boutique physical media releases usually contain many extra pieces of material that cannot be found with the film if seen in the cinema or streamed online. In the case of this release, the extra material is found in the form of another film on the disc that also had not been released in Britain, directed by Pete Walker called *The Big Switch*. There are no other explicit special features on the release although it is common for other labels to release such things as historical and contemporary commentaries and behind the scenes documentaries. One thing that this release does contain that is a staple of boutique physical media releases: the collectable booklet. The booklet is a curated collection of short essays on the films including a contribution from Pete Walker which re-examine and re-contextualise the films on the dual-format release. For the specialist collector the booklet also contains information on the transfer and how the materials were gathered to complete the new restoration of the films. This aspect of the release is partially the reason it is released on physical media so the cinephiles can experience the effort that went into the reclamation of a film that had been difficult to view since its inception in 1970.

To conclude, the Flipside has taken the opposite approach to the Criterion Collection mission statement by releasing films that aren't initially considered classic or contemporary films from around the world by concentrating on lost, cult films from the British archives however they do put in the commitment when it comes to the restoration of the films 'presenting each film as its maker would want it seen, in state-of-the-art restorations with special features designed to encourage repeated watching and deepen the viewer's appreciation of the art of film' (Our Mission) *Man of Violence* fits this segment of Criterion's mission statement as the BFI have restored the film to a level that the film had not been seen since its original theatrical release.

Citations

Cultural Institution/Organisation

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